

Oral History Interview with
PRESTON BREEDEN / TYREE GRYDEN

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1999

At Skyland Conference Hall
66th Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter
of the
Civilian Conservation Corps

Interviewer: John Amberson
Park volunteer in archives

Transcribed by: Gloria Updyke

Shenandoah National Park
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Transcription

JA: We're at the Skyland Conference Hall in the Shenandoah National Park at the 66th annual reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter of Civilian Conservation Corps. My name is John Amberson, I'm a volunteer in the park. I'm sitting here with Mr. Gryden, is that correct?

PB: Breeden, Mr. Uh, Oh see Gryden, yeah.

JA: Mr. Gryden, and Mr. Breeden.

TG: Right, Yeah.

JA: Mr., uh Breeden, would you state your name and when you were enlisted in the CCC?

PB: That's me. Yeah. My first name is Preston. My last name is Breeden. I went in uh, 1937, in Camp-12, NP-12, and I left in '39.

JA: Ok. And you sir, state your name.

TG: I, I don't know the date I went in. I'd have to go back home to find it out. But I left.

JA: Would you state your name please?

TG: Gryden.

JA: And roughly what year was that?

TG: The year that I went in?

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: Let's see, I really don't know.

JA: You've forgotten. That's alright. No problem at all. Well tell me about when you enlisted. How did you hear about the CCC?

TG: I don't know. I was born on a farm.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: And some of the boys from [Sea___] City, that's where I was born. They were in a Camp and come back and told me about it, and then I got in it.

JA: Ok, your father was a farmer?

TG: Yeah.

JA: And uh, this was Depression times, and things were probably.

TG: Yeah they were. [whistles] They were hard. Well uh, over 64 years ago, and uh.

JA: Yes, and so the money that you made?

TG: That's when I come out. It's been 64 years.

JA: Right, 64 years, yes. So the money that was sent back to your family?

TG: All of it.

JA: It was very helpful?

TG: Yes it was. Yes it was.

JA: Yeah, how about yourself sir? Where did you hear about CCC?

PB: I was born and raised you know, in uh, 2 miles of Camp 3.

JA: Where, where was that exactly?

PB: On a, on Skyline Drive.

JA: You were born on Skyline Drive?

PB: Yeah, uh. Yeah uh. Pocasin shelter, you know what it is?

JA: Yes I do.

PB: I was born and raised where that cabin is.

JA: Next, where that cabin was?

PB: Well that cabin, well they burnt the old house down, we moved down to my grandmother's.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: Moved down to that, the church, I guess it's about a mile on down. Mission church down in there.

JA: Right.

PB: And that's where she died.

JA: Is that right?

PB: We had saw mills. I's looking at this lumber out here. This lumber's probably some that we sawed. Because we sawed, we could cut dead chestnuts in the park, and uh, we sawed lumber for, back at Big Meadows. And uh.

JA: What Camp were you in?

PB: Camp 12, NP-12.

JA: NP-12.

PB: Back towards Front Royal.

JA: Right, and what Camp were you in sir?

TG: Uh, at uh Crozet, Virginia.

JA: Crozet?

TG: Uh, Mormon's River Camp.

JA: Ok.

TG: It's 10 miles above Charlottesville. And that was a headquarters Camp. That was a big Camp. An awful big Camp.

JA: What was your job when you went in the CCC? What kind of work did you do?

TG: I drove the uh, the army truck, I drove the ambulance, and I drove the official car.

JA: You did?

TG: I went from one to the other.

JA: You were a driver, primary work?

TG: In, in the army division.

JA: For the army?

TG: We had a big army division. See we went around, all around everywhere around, went so far around inspecting the Camps. And I, when I was driving an official car, the ambulance went from there to Walter Reid, depending on what, you know how bad they were.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: Other than that they would take them over to the University of Virginia. Some of them.

JA: Yes, somebody, and what type of work did you do, just briefly?

PB: I was, I went on in, I went Bob Via, was my field superintendent.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: And then uh, it went uh, first being Weakley on High Top somewhere in there, in all, we made fire trails. He drove the big tractor and I used the grader for a while.

JA: Right.

PB: And then after that for almost 6 months or longer, well then Levin Duskin, was his, planted trees and things. He had 2 Camps, so Bob let me uh, go over to him, and I was a, worked with Levin Duskin 'til I left, planting trees along the Skyline Drive. I was the leader.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: And at the time you would go in the, in CC, I made \$45 dollars a month.

JA: \$45 dollars a month?

PB: Yeah.

JA: And how much would go back to your family?

PB: I, I would get \$10 dollars, the rest, that would go back to my family.

JA: That's very good.

PB: But at first, 'til I got to be a leader, why.

JA: You were making \$35 a month, yes.

PB: Yeah.

JA: Um, those were hard times. What was your uh, now you were, you were right here on the Drive when you went in because you were very close by.

PB: Yeah.

JA: But on you sir, you had to um, did you ever go to a place where they gave you physical conditioning before you got into the Camp, into the CCC?

TG: Did I have to do what?

JA: Have to go into a, uh, military institution and they did physical conditioning for you, and uh, to get you in shape before you started working, or did you go right into the CCC?

TG: I was, I was in shape.

JA: You were? I didn't. And same for you, you just went right to the Camp and started in?

PB: Yeah.

JA: Uh, well you described your work assignments. Did you uh, now you lived in, you lived in barracks at the time. Is that correct? The barracks were already constructed?

PB: Oh yeah.

JA: And you had the same over here, the barracks were already constructed?

TG: Mm hmm.

JA: Did they uh, after the, your day's work was over with, did they have a lot of educational things that you could be doing?

PB: Some.

JA: Did they, did you participate in those things?

PB: Some. Yeah.

JA: Yeah. What type of programs did they have that you could get involved in?

PB: Well, if you, uh, depending on what you wanted to take up. I uh, I well, after I went with uh, Levin out here all mine was, was just learning how to plant trees, right in Front Royal there.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: Where you come in. It was nothin', but just bluegrass fields there. And we planted trees all along that.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: That's why I, worked for months and months and months there. All along the banks, all the way through up there.

JA: And were these trees, uh did they grow them in the park here, or did they bring them in?

PB: No, they was in the park. He would go pick them out, and.

JA: You'd dig them out?

PB: We'd dig 'em out. I know how to dig a tree. Save the ball on the bottom.

JA: Uh, was there uh, now you were with uh, both with your own groups. Was there any problems with the various CCC Camps having problems with each other? Did they uh, did the guys seem to get along pretty well?

PB: Yeah. Well one time, back at Skyline Drive it gets pretty rough. There's a bunch of young guys come in from, I don't know where they were from. And uh, you were supposed to get your clothes you know, your bunk, your bed, your everything, and carry it to your barracks. And they wouldn't do it. So they all got mad and got after them. I took a guy and put a saw in his ear. And they left. Some of them walked on, and I went on back home, where they got to. In the end, big lugs[??] come up there and got after us then. We, wasn't nothing we could do about it.

JA: No. No.

PB: My educational adviser, I went to Madison. And working with Tom Runkle, the game warden, when him and Patty Matherson, and were gonna stock Rapidan, trout. And we were waiting there, and who come in there, and uh, the building we was at was my educational [Yale____]. And he was [____] I said no. I asked what was he doing, he said he was trying [____] just the same, Madison.

JA: Now you were so close to where your family was living, you could go home in the evening almost, couldn't you?

PB: Well uh, uh, ain't many miles of this Skyline Drive that I haven't walked. There were several boys from back there, was in the Camp back there, would come over and, Bacon Hollow, Shifflet Hollow, did you ever hear of that?

JA: Yes I certainly have.

PB: Well, there's a lot of them boys from out back there.

JA: Well, then you were right at home here.

PB: Yep.

JA: And you were making money.

PB: Yep.

JA: Uh, that's very, that's very good. Um, with all of your experiences in the CCC, did that help you in your life after the program?

PB: Well, not, not a whole because I went back after I left from here, and went to Alexandria in '39. I went to the parks, building buildings.

JA: Mm hmm.

PB: So, that's where I ended up.

JA: Where did you go after you left the CCCs?

TG: Well, what I always wanted to be was a machinist, and uh, well I was in Camp. See we had a lot of sports. Like baseball, football, I won a scholarship to the University of Richmond. And uh 3 of us there, but none of the 3 taken it, to University of Virginia. I mean to the University of Richmond.

JA: Where did the scholarship, where was that, where was that offered from? Who offered you the scholarship to do that?

TG: University of Richmond.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: 3 of us, that were playing football. And uh, running track, I won a gold medal in the 440. They wanted me to break the world record, but I said no.

JA: And where was this that, that uh.

TG: That was a uh, when I broke the record was at Virginia Tech.

JA: So you participated in a lot of the sports we hear in the, when your in the CCC.

TG: It was a wonderful Camp. We never had no trouble.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: We had a lot of people, I mean a lot of CC boys. In the forestry and in the army, we had right many.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: But we never had no trouble that I ever remember whatsoever.

JA: Did the, what about the sports? Did uh, you participated in uh, in what, which sports? Baseball? Or the football?

TG: Baseball. All of them. Baseball, football, uh played uh, tennis with a professor from uh the University of Virginia, Professor [Pigna_____].

JA: They came up there to the Camps?

TG: And at the Camp we had uh, tennis courts and all right there and everything.

JA: That's very good. And you had uh, did you play between, teams between the various Camps?

TG: Yeah. Yeah.

JA: And so you participated in a lot of sports, huh?

TG: Oh yeah.

JA: And you had plenty of time to do that after work?

TG: Well, now the way it was, if you were into sports, they give you time.

JA: Do they?

TG: Oh yeah. Now if you were on the team, could make the team, you could uh, at least at our Camp, I don't know about the others.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: You had the time to. I don't know how they worked us in, but they did.

JA: Keep the morale up.

TG: And uh, so far as I was concerned it was a wonderful place as long as I was there.

JA: That's great. That's great.

TG: I never had no trouble. We went to school there, they'd teach school at night. I went to school and taken up a lot of, typing.

JA: What did you take?

TG: Typing.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: A lot of stuff. And uh at one time I could type right, I knew everything on it, but now I probably couldn't do that on it. [Tapping on table.]

JA: You forget sometimes. It'll come back to you.

TG: We had some uh, we had uh good teachers.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: And the boys that wanted to go to class could go at night.

JA: Yeah. So what'd you do when you left the CCC? You went to school?

TG: No I come, I got married. When I was uh, just 20 years old, just 20. And I've been married 64 years to the same woman.

JA: Very nice.

TG: She's an angel. Was an angel, 'til the lord give her to me. So I wanted to be a machinist, and I finally got my job uh, in Washington D.C. Her people lived in uh, Burke, VA. And uh, we went up there after we were married. And I worked with her father. He was in the roofing business at the time, and I didn't like it. I still wouldn't. So I got me a job with uh, Smoots' Sand and Gravel and got into the shop pretty quick. In 9 months I was made shop foreman.

JA: Sounds very good.

TG: 21 men I had underneath me.

JA: Sounds like the both of you.

TG: So that was, I say pretty fast to do it.

JA: Yeah, well you.

TG: In the machine shop that we had. We had the largest machine shop from Baltimore to uh, Portsmouth, Virginia.

JA: Do you think your experience in the CCC really uh, was a turning point in your life, or?

TG: Well it, it helped me some. See we had a big shop to there. That worked on a lot of their equipment.

JA: Mm hmm.

TG: See we I lot of, had those bulldozers and all that went up uh, up there on Skyline Drive. 'Cause I remember one time I kept telling them, if you keep putting it on that truck there, wasn't a little while they're gonna break it. They put one of there and it just spread that thing out like I say, right on down to the ground. Then we got the first 16-wheeler, the army did, truck, and that was the first one I ever saw, and I was the first one to ever drive it. But I didn't drive but a little ways. But I was the first one to drive it.

JA: Well.

TG: And that was uh, and watching this shop, I would go over there when I, you know, when driving the ambulance or the official car, and watch them working in that, which, which helped me some. And I've worked on, well two. Uh you know when I was young I worked on cars, watched them you know a little bit. And for whatever I run in to Camp I used to go to the blacksmith shop and watch them shoe the horses and all.

JA: Well you have background. Background. Listen, thank you.

TG: It's been a long time.

JA: Yes, yes, I, I thank you both for stopping by and talking with me today, and uh we'll add your reminiscences to our [collections].

PB: Is uh, Bob Gibbs, I wonder if he's still living? He was uh, and when he left and married, he went to the chief ranger Yellowstone. Noah Hoskins was his.

JA: I'm not sure if they're still living but we can ask Reed Engle.

